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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [FAID](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ'S PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS: AN IRAQI SHOW, BUT  
THERE WAS PLENTY OF U.S. HELP

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for reason 1.4 (d).

**¶11. (C) Summary:** Although the GOI was in the lead on the successful January provincial elections, U.S. assistance greatly facilitated the elections logically and helped the GOI to conduct the voting in a manner approximating international norms. Our support for the Iraqi provincial elections began well before the passage of the 2008 Provincial Election Law and continued to the announcement of the certified results. In coordination with UNAMI, State, USAID, the PRTs, MNF-I, and U.S.-funded NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) all helped to shape and support the provincial elections. MNF-I helped with all aspects of election security. Notably it brokered and oversaw security arrangements in disputed areas along the KRG borders on election day. MNF-I also supported the transportation of all elections materials, including route-planning, security and tracking. MNF-I also led communications exercises to prepare ISF for election day. In many of the provinces, MNF-I forces provided secure transportation support for UNAMI staff and over 300 international observers. As Coalition Forces begin to leave, and as we move through a crowded Iraqi electoral calendar, we will continue to provide substantial elections assistance to the Iraqis, while carefully balancing it with the need to have them in the lead. End Summary.

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Advocacy and Legal Assistance  
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**¶12. (C)** The successful conduct of the recent provincial elections has rightly been praised as an important step in Iraq's political development. The Iraqi government deserves great credit for this achievement. As we expect the Iraqis to do more and more without us, however, it is important to appreciate the degree to which the U.S. Government contributed to this success. In early 2008, the Embassy mobilized to advocate for and shape the draft Provincial Elections Law. In July, the Speaker of the parliament managed to pass the law by permitting a secret ballot on the section relating to Kirkuk (now known as Article 23). Two days later, President Talabani and Vice President Abdul Mehdi vetoed the law and the Embassy shifted into high gear to rescue the bill. In an effort to seek compromise, Embassy and MNF-I personnel met with GOI officials, key political party leaders, and members of parliament. Senior USG officials also called on top leaders to find solutions. We closely coordinated our efforts with the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI). There likely would not have been elections at all without U.S. and UNAMI pressure, since the major political blocs were not enthusiastic about holding elections.

**¶13. (SBU)** The Embassy deployed numerous technical experts to assist with drafting and the deliberative processes. The Political Section's Office of Constitutional and Legislative Affairs (CLA) and IFES each provided oral and written

analyses of drafts of the law, and presented option papers requested by GOI law-makers. After weeks of effort by the Embassy and UNAMI, parliament passed the election law on September 24. The Presidency Council signed it but requested an amendment to add minority representation, which UNAMI's Electoral Assistance Team, with political and technical assistance from the Embassy, helped to draft.

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¶4. (SBU) Interagency collaboration inside the Embassy and between the Embassy and MNF-I and MNC-I produced the provincial elections "Road Show," an informal presentation delivered by POL and USAID to most of the 14 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), four provincial support teams and 11 embedded PRTs. There were two rounds of the Road Show. The spring tour provided Embassy policy guidance and technical information on the election law. The fall "Road Show" briefed on the mechanics of the elections and GOI preparations. Both road shows identified USG assistance options that helped PRTs undertake activities to support the provincial elections. After the "Road Show" presentation, every PRT identified an Elections Officer who developed a close working relationship with the IHEC Governorate Election Office (GEO) in their province. While relationships with GEO Directors varied, overall the effort yielded a tremendous amount of formal and informal reporting. The PRTs also served as a focal point for elections-related technical assistance. Through use of OPA's Quick Response Funds (QRF), PRTs were able to support timely voter education and outreach programs tailored to local communities and delivered by Iraqi NGOs. For example, PRT Dhi Qhar funded the Iraqi Society for Change NGO to provide voter education training to 2,000 university students and faculty. Through a QRF grant from

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PRT Maysan, the Forum for Civil Society Development provided similar training to 14 other NGOs. PRT Nineva funding enabled the Iraq Institute for Development to conduct over 160 lectures for opinion leaders in each of the governorate's districts on the electoral process and voting modalities. PRTs also helped to connect USG-funded NGOs like IFES, NDI, IRI and IREX with projects and opportunities in the provinces.

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#### Voter Education and Media Training

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¶5. (U) The Embassy, through DRL, funded numerous efforts to increase Iraqis' knowledge about voter registration, voting procedures, and voting for special populations. The International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted voter education programs targeted at increasing voter turnout. During the days running up to the elections, IRI published mock ballots in newspapers and on billboards, funded TV and radio spots, and worked through local NGO networks to go door-to-door to encourage voting. In addition, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) provided critical support to IHEC throughout the elections period by establishing and supporting Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) Media Center in Baghdad. All official announcements on the provincial elections were managed through the Media Center. Finally, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) sharpened the skills of several hundred Iraqi journalists by training on interviewing techniques and political coverage.

¶6. (U) Understanding the vital need for voter education in this election, USAID's Iraq Rapid Assistance Program (IRAP) coordinated possibly the largest grass-root voter education effort ever undertaken in Iraq. USAID estimates that over four million Iraqis benefited from IRAP's support for outreach on voter's rights as well as election processes and laws. The Voter Education initiative provided grants for training local Iraqi civil society organizations on how to conduct outreach. It also added to roughly 5.5 million

dollars in grants for activities including literature, posters, and program instruction across eleven provinces. The countrywide Voter Education program was conducted in collaboration with IHEC, IFES, and more than 170 civil society organizations and NGOs. IRAP Quick Release Funds were used for over 2 million dollars in media outreach grants, which covered additional election awareness via public service announcements on TV, in the newspaper, and on flyers, posters, and billboards.

**¶7. (SBU)** We do not have polling data tracking levels of public understanding of the voting process over time that would allow us to assess the effectiveness of U.S.-provided voter education. However, IFES recently completed a comparative analysis of invalid ballots in the provincial elections. The number of invalid ballots -- those ballots which are made invalid by being marked in a manner than makes the voter's intent opaque -- is generally held to be a proxy indicator of ballot design effectiveness and voter education efforts. The average rate of invalid votes across the 14 governorates was 3.5 percent. IFES compared this number to averages in similar regional elections and in post-conflict elections. Iraq's voters performed at a higher than average rate. (Some sample invalid ballot figures from elections held in regional countries in the past two years: Morocco 19 percent; Algeria 14.4 percent; Cyprus 5.6 percent; Iraq 3.5 percent; Israel 3.5 percent; Turkey 2.8 percent). The report notes that this achievement is all the more noteworthy since this election was Iraq's first open list election.

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#### Political Entities and Candidate Training

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**¶8. (U)** IRI and NDI delivered nonpartisan, issues-based political training for dozens of Iraqi organizations. NDI conducted ballot training for party agents and domestic monitors, including special concerns for illiterate voters. More than 20,000 domestic observers received NDI training to participate in the provincial elections and in future elections. IRI recently reported that 67% of the candidates who won provincial council seats were from parties that had received IRI's party training.

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#### Technical Assistance for IHEC

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**¶9. (U)** USAID, through its implementer IFES, provided comprehensive technical expertise to IHEC. IFES was instrumental in elections planning, systems development, and

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in some cases direct support of operations. IFES provided experience and technical expertise to enable IHEC to run a complex election that approximately met internationally acknowledged best practices and accepted norms. IFES also converted the Ministry of Trade's food distribution list into a draft voter roll, formulated regulations to enact the Provincial Election Law, established IHEC's public outreach department, developed methods for seat allocation to ensure adequate minorities' and women's representation, built the IT and communications infrastructure that links the GEOs to the headquarters in Baghdad, developed standard operating procedures, contributed to ballot design, established a formal complaints process, and augmented IHEC's results tallying capabilities.

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#### Capacity Building for IHEC

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**¶10. (C)** IFES and UNAMI together formed the International Election Assistance Team (IEAT) in Iraq, whose mission is to build IHEC's capacity. IHEC, established in April 2007, is

still a young organization with limited ability to administer electoral events. Most agree IEAT's assistance was instrumental to IHEC's success in carrying out the complex, large-scale effort required to ensure the January 31 provincial elections were conducted at approximately international (Western) standards. IEAT's capacity-building efforts have included advising and mentoring IHEC's nine-person Board of Commissioners and training staff in IHEC's headquarters, 19 GEOs, and the Kurdish Regional Elections Office (KREO), and built on elections assistance efforts begun in 2005.

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MNF-I Overwatch and Security  
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¶11. (C) Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) provided direct support to Iraqi institutions before, during, and after Iraq's provincial elections. MNF-I at times partnered with other USG or UN agencies, and in some cases expanded Embassy efforts. MNF-I focused on advising the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) on the security of the elections. Much of its effort was focused on the ad hoc Iraqi Supreme Committee for Election Security (SCES) which dealt directly with IHEC. As part of this effort, MNF-I assigned several Liaison Officers (LNOs), to partner with Iraqi officials at the MoI, MoD, IHEC headquarters, and in the 19 GEOs. At senior levels, MNF-I met regularly with Iraqi officials on security issues. It notably brokered and oversaw security arrangements in disputed areas along the KRG borders on election day. MNF-I supported the transportation of all elections materials, including route-planning, security and tracking. MNF-I also led communications exercises to prepare ISF for election day.

In many of the provinces, MNF-I forces provided secure transportation support for UNAMI staff and over 300 international observers. The international observers only trusted MNF-I for such logistical help. Without MNF-I, there would have been no international observers.

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International Election Observers  
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¶12. (C) To show support for the Iraqi process and to enhance public confidence, the Embassy promoted and supported placing over 400 international observers in the field in 18 provinces on January 31. A modest proposal to place a handful of UNAMI teams in the field eventually developed into a broad effort with participation by over 25 countries and organizations. In unprecedented partnership, the Embassy, PRTs and MNF-I QIn unprecedented partnership, the Embassy, PRTs and MNF-I carefully orchestrated logistical and security support for 11 UNAMI teams, 68 U.S. teams (some of which contained other foreign observers), and over 20 additional foreign teams operating independently of MNF-I movements (mainly in Baghdad). The scope and magnitude of the U.S.-supported election observer effort was broadly covered in the news media and throughout Iraq. The observer effort resulted in somewhat higher transparency, improved understanding, and increased domestic confidence in the Iraqi elections. It also showed that a large observer mission is possible as we consider our possible options for the national elections at the end of 2009 or it notably brokered and oversaw security arrangements in disputed areas along the KRG borders on election day. MNF-I supported the transportation of all elections materials, including route-planning, security and tracking. MNF-I also led communications exercises to prepare ISF for election day. In many of the provinces, MNF-I forces provided secure transportation support for UNAMI staff and over 300 international observers.

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Comment

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¶13. (C) The U.S. provided critical assistance that helped IHEC conduct credible, legitimate elections on time and in a way generally consistent with international best practices. While Iraq led and managed the elections, it was not without substantial support -- and frequent pressure -- from a wide array of USG and international actors in the background.

Iraq faces a full elections agenda in 2009, including KRG elections, district and sub-district elections, Constitutional and Security Agreement referenda, and, especially, parliamentary elections. We are currently assessing our support for the provincial elections as we look ahead to the parliamentary elections to determine what worked, what didn't, and what the shape of U.S. elections assistance will be as the military leaves. We want to balance building Iraq's institutional capacity to conduct elections with the political need for timely, credible, and legitimate elections.

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